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ABSTRACT

The Bronx Education Endowment Fund (BEEF), established in 1985, provides mini-grants of up to $100 to fund simple projects aimed at educational improvement. During the first two years of the program, 18 mini-grants were awarded to 16 teachers, one student, and one parent organization. A large number of both regular and special education students, from pre-kindergarten to 12th grade, received benefits from the projects. The projects were cost-efficient and encouraged active student participation in the educational process. Many of the programs were characterized by the following: (1) a hands-on approach to learning; (2) the use of outside human resources; (3) culminating activities that served as an evaluative measure; (4) an investigative approach to learning; and (5) a focus on the specific needs of the pupils. BEEF uses a simplified proposal process. Some projects in the following areas are described: (1) the humanities and social sciences; (2) mathematics and science; and (3) special education. Photographs illustrate the text. A short bibliography is included. (BJV)

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Mission Possible: Innovations in the Bronx Schools

Stephen Franse, Adrienne Siegel, Sharon L. Schulte, Steven Benardo, and John M. Skalski

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Mission Possible

A war is being waged in the Bronx public schools of New York City. The enemies are apathy, ignorance, and hopelessness. The weapon is small but powerful: the mini-grant, and it is being deployed by a concerned group of educators and community leaders who have formed the Bronx Education Endowment Fund (BEEF). BEEF has undertaken the rescue of the Bronx public schools by tapping the creative energies of the people who inhabit them.

Ordinary people – teachers, students, parents – are the schools' most extraordinary resource. They know the territory best and often come up with simple but ingenious solutions for the problems in their schools. BEEF asks these people for ideas that can enhance the quality of education and provides mini-grants of up to $100 to help turn these ideas into reality.

It's astonishing to see what can be done with $100. The eighteen projects funded in the first two years of the program (1985-1987) involved more than 900 regular and special education students at every grade level in a variety of subjects ranging from art to literature, from math and science to homemaking skills and documentary film making.

"For want of a nail," many projects never get done. BEEF provides a mechanism for teachers, students, and parents to implement innovative classroom proposals in an uncomplicated fashion. BEEF's philosophy is to nurture inventive ideas by rewarding originality and

simplicity in project proposals. Applicants for these mini-grants answer five basic questions on a one-page form:

1. Briefly explain the *need* or *problem* that this proposal will help to meet or overcome.
2. State the major *objective* of this program.
3. Describe the main *activities* of this program. Who will participate? Indicate numbers of students and their grade levels. What will be the major educational benefits of the program?
4. Explain how you will *evaluate* this program to determine if it was successful.
5. List a proposed *budget*, including all items to be purchased and/or other costs. (The sum may not exceed $100.)

During the first two years of this program, 18 mini-grants were awarded to 16 teachers, one student, and one parents' association. An analysis of the mini-grants funded in 1987 reveals some common characteristics and points to some pioneering educational strategies.

Most of the projects emphasized a hands-on approach to learning. In one intermediate school, students with learning disabilities bred hamsters, fish, and other animals in order to develop a sense of responsibility and to associate this experience with their own health needs. In an elementary school a special education class produced a documentary about their school. They acquired not only video camera techniques but also human interaction skills by interviewing many different people.

Many of the projects used people from outside the schools as resources. A school drama group used professionals to teach the skills of stage lighting, costume design, and makeup. Special education students from an elementary school interviewed such people as a legislator, sanitation worker, pet store owner, karate instructor, policeman, firefighter, and museum director to learn how these persons contribute to their neighborhood. A PTA group received funding for a project that involved parents in making puppets for use in kindergarten,

Students in a Bronx intermediate school learn to care for hamsters purchased with a BEEF mini-grant.

first-grade, and English-as-a-second-language classes and in sewing costumes for school and class plays.

Most projects had culminating activities that served as one form of evaluative measure. In one elementary school a hockey tournament capped a curriculum module devoted to learning the rules and safety practices of the game; in another elementary school pupils submitted their science projects for a school science fair. The serving of brunch was an important achievement for a group of retarded students, and they gained practical living skills by learning to set a table, serve food, and clean dishes. The creation of posters, bulletin-board displays, book jackets, T-shirts, graphs, diaries, compositions, poems, videotapes, slides, animal habitats, costumes, crossword puzzles, journals, maps, skits, and dioramas attest to the rich variety of activities growing out of these funded projects.

Many of the projects used an investigative approach to learning. For example, high school students enhanced their awareness of ca-

reer options and goals by taking an interest assessment instrument. Elementary school pupils observed and recorded the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly. Fifth- and sixth-graders learned how math is related to the "real world" by measuring the height of many buildings in the Bronx from the ground level with clinometers and trundle wheels and putting their calculations on both graph paper and a computer.

Teachers designed programs geared to the specific needs of their pupils. This was particularly true for special-needs learners. One elementary teacher used sculpture to provide an appropriate physical release for hyperactive, easily distracted students. The teacher took these children to the Museum of Modern Art and to the Lehman College Art Gallery to view contemporary sculpture. This was followed by workshops in the college art studio on the properties of clay and pariscraft, small-group instruction back at school, and an exhibition of the students' finished products in the school art fair.

An analysis of the 18 projects has far-reaching implications for improving education.

1. A large number of students received benefits from each project. Target populations ranged from a high of 180 students studying the metamorphosis of the caterpillar to butterfly to a low of 10 students learning to sculpt. An average of 50 pupils participated in each activity.
2. The projects were cost efficient; expenditures ranged from a low of two cents per student for a science project to a high of $2.00 per student for an art program. Overall the costs averaged 51 cents per pupil. These projects delivered services so effectively and efficiently that other funded programs pale in comparison.
3. The 18 proposals covered every grade level from prekindergarten to twelfth grade and involved both regular and special education students.

4. All the projects encouraged active student participation in the instructional process.
5. Teachers discovered that there was an organization in the Bronx that shared their enthusiasm for children and that provided them with the means to make their creative ideas come to life.

Because these small mini-grants went such a long way, one wonders why boards of education do not underwrite more of these programs. If the New York City Board of Education funded mini-grants for every teacher who wrote a meritorious proposal, it would cost about two million dollars – only .005% of this city's budget. Surely other school systems across the country could do much to stimulate teacher creativity if they funded the modest amounts needed for these cost-effective mini-grant projects. (See fastback 200 *Mini-Grants for Classroom Teachers* by Leo McGee.)

BEEF's mini-grants are accomplishing what Ernest Boyer, Albert Shanker, and many other education leaders have targeted as a major goal for the profession in the 1980s: to renew the community's respect for education and educators. When teachers enjoy the autonomy to practice their craft, they can tap all kinds of resources lying fallow in their communities to enrich instruction. They must be encouraged to experiment with homegrown projects that are appropriate for their particular schools This is what BEEF has been encouraging; and it works! It is "mission possible."

Rescuing Public Education: The BEEF Story

Foundations and private corporations have had a major influence on education by funding programs that are beyond the means of a school system. Many foundation funded projects have involved millions of dollars; but there is also a place for small, discretionary mini-grants from foundations, which can contribute to excellence in the classroom and at the same time enhance teacher morale. Such an example is the Bronx Education Endowment Fund (BEEF).

BEEF is a broad-based, nonprofit, tax-exempt organization committed to building bridges between the business sector and the public schools. Its board of directors reflects a cross section of the Bronx's educational, business, and civic communities. BEEF operates from the financial contributions of corporations, unions, community organizations, and individuals. All money raised by the foundation is invested, and only the accrued interest from the principal is used to finance projects.

Three principles guide BEEF. The first is volunteerism. All board members serve without compensation and share the tasks needed to carry out the foundation's operation. The second is simplicity. The fund supports small but significant projects, which can be run by volunteers without overhead costs. The third is student-centered. Grants are earmarked for student-centered projects that improve the quality of education in the individual classroom or school. Special consideration is given to projects that enhance community relations

and that can be easily replicated. Grants are not given for general operating expenses or for replacing public funds.

Steps to Success

In comparison to the elaborate grant proposal procedures of most foundations, BEEF has simplified the proposal process to only five elements: 1) a statement of the need or problem, 2) the objective of the project, 3) the activities to be included, 4) how the project will be evaluated, and 5) the budget that will be needed. BEEF's board of directors reviews each proposal application and rates them using the following criteria on a five-point scale:

1. Is the project relevant to supporting instructional objectives?
2. Is the project consistent with helping students develop basic, creative and/or problem-solving skills?
3. Is the project feasible with the funds available?
4. Is a needs assessment and evaluation included in the project?
5. Does the project identify specific objectives for a targeted population?
6. Is the project capable of achieving stated objectives with the target population?
7. Is the project able to be replicated?
8. Are project activities clearly defined?
9. Does the project enhance and support existing curriculum objectives?
10. Is the project unable to be supported by existing school resources and/or funds?

After the grants are awarded, BEEF sends congratulatory letters to the recipients inviting them to a ceremony at which the mini-grants are presented. This event is highly publicized throughout the borough and elsewhere in order to make the public aware of the good things happening in the Bronx schools.

Once the projects are under way, recipients often invite members of BEEF's board of directors, the board of education, and the community to view the activities. Again, the media are invited to witness the projects in action and to report the success stories the projects often provide. Displaying their work completed during the project is a source of pleasure and pride for the students involved. Participating in a BEEF project can become a long-treasured event.

When the project is completed, mini-grant recipients submit a brief, personal evaluation to the BEEF board of directors covering the following items:

- Please describe what the mini-grant meant to you and to your students.
- Please provide us with any student quotes about the mini-grant program.
- Is there anything you would like us to be aware of or share with other teachers across the United States?

Now in its third year, BEEF continues to provide funding to enrich the education of students in an urban setting often thought to be chaotic and fraught with apathy. BEEF provides the funding, but the critical factor is the educators who willingly give that extra measure of time and talent to make a difference in the lives of urban students by devising new and creative ways of teaching. One never wins who does not enter the race.

Mini-Grants in the Humanities and Social Sciences

At a time when network television chooses to denigrate the public schools of a beleaguered New York City borough by calling its sitcom series "The Bronx Zoo," a small grassroots organization with only meager funds is proving that youngsters from disadvantaged backgrounds can transcend their limited circumstances to achieve educational excellence. For the price of two tickets to a Broadway show, BEEF is helping hundreds of youngsters to increase their awareness of the world around them and the ideas of people past and present.

Projects in the Humanities

In order to reach out to the world beyond their immediate environment, students must develop communication competencies, the most important being the ability to read. Encouraging students to develop their communication skills has been a major theme in the projects funded by BEEF.

To increase his students' appreciation of fiction, poetry, and biography, Steven Schneider, a fifth-grade teacher, used his $100 grant to purchase quality paperbacks. He divided his students into small groups to read, discuss, and write about a variety of full-length pieces of literature. When his students showed a desire to read more extensively, the teacher knew he had succeeded.

In another elementary school, Fran Hertzberg launched "Literature Alive" in an effort to improve her students' standardized reading test scores, which were one or more years below grade level. To encourage her students to read widely and think creatively, Hertzberg used her $100 grant to purchase paperback copies of *Tom Sawyer*, *Treasure Island*, and *Twenty-Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. And she had enough left over to purchase some theater tickets and slides to use as rewards for her students' efforts. Armed with these resources, she worked with her underachieving fifth-graders on vocabulary enrichment, figurative language, plot and character analysis, stereotyping, making inferences, logical sequence of ideas, and the author's purpose. Students compared fictional characters' reactions to situations with their own experiences. Through role playing, journal writing, constructing dioramas, designing book jackets, drawing illustrations, making T-shirts, and visiting the theater, students not only improved their vocabulary, writing proficiency, and thinking skills but also were exposed vicariously to new people and places. Most important, they discovered that reading is fun.

Second-graders in District 12 of the Bronx developed a love of writing through an innovative grant that used peer tutors and film-making techniques. Gladys Rivera realized that because her students were afraid of making errors they were reluctant to put their ideas on paper. To eliminate these fears and to make writing more enjoyable, Rivera, with the assistance of 12 fifth-grade peer tutors, first engaged her class in a variety of prewriting experiences, such as brainstorming, drawing, listening, and observing. Then the class wrote and edited their work in different forms, such as stories, poems, reports, and advertisements. Using her BEEF funds, she purchased a production kit, which provided the materials for students to illustrate their stories and then paste them onto "frame paper," thus creating a form of film strip. The finished products became part of the classroom's permanent library and are available to other classes that wish to borrow them. By assisting the second-graders with their writing, the fifth-

grade peer tutors reported they felt much more confident when they took the mandated New York State Writing Test.

In Linda Gerstman's second-grade class, children in one of the most impoverished sections of the Bronx were able to enhance their language skills and to develop an appreciation of the community's diverse cultural heritage. Gerstman used her $100 BEEF grant to buy poster supplies, blank videotapes, a classroom folklore library (including stories about Paul Bunyan, Johnny Appleseed, Aesop's Fables, and books on idioms), and folk song recordings. Gerstman's students collected and recorded the oral traditions of their families. She also used such imaginative enrichment activities as videotaping student dramatizations of fables and myths; having the class create a crossword puzzle of gods and goddesses; teaching the class American folk songs, dances, and folk hero tales; taking the class to the Museum of American Folkcraft; inviting parents of various ethnic backgrounds to speak to the class about their native folklore; and preparing posters illustrating a personal experience related to one of the morals in Aesop's Fables. By the end of the year, these young children were able to incorporate proverbs and the figurative language of the oral tradition into their conversations.

BEEF funding also has helped students in the intermediate grades to improve their reading competency and oral presentation skills through a theater project. Students in Julia Rivers-Jones's classes in sixth through eighth grade enhanced both their reading and social skills by participating in dramatic presentations. She used her mini-grant to pay outside resource people to teach set design, stage lighting, and makeup techniques and to pay for materials for sets and costumes. By funding this project, BEEF supported an imaginative method for helping students to overcome their reluctance to read aloud.

Sixth-grade teacher Marc Socol helped stretch his students' creative writing ability by having them write short puppet plays with two or three characters. Dividing his class into small groups, he had them write character descriptions of the puppets as well as a story, which

the puppets would act out. His $100 mini-grant provided the youngsters with the materials to construct the puppet characters they had created. Socol's class derived multiple benefits from the project, including the pleasure of seeing their original writing performed by the puppets they had crafted and seeing the appreciation of kindergarteners who had an opportunity to view a live puppet show for the first time.

The medium of clay became the vehicle for artistic expression and self-control for 10 hyperactive 12-year-olds in Gayle Smith's special education class. She used her mini-grant to purchase modeling clay and pariscraft supplies. In addition to providing an appropriate physical outlet for these hyperactive youngsters, they learned that sculpture is an art form where "anything goes." During the sculpture project, the students not only increased their attention span, improved their motor coordination, and learned to follow directions but also gained recognition by having their finished sculptures on display in the school art fair. And they had an opportunity to become acquainted with the wider world of art by visiting the Lehman College Art Gallery.

Firefighter William Palazzola (center) shows students around the firehouse in a project that helped elementary students learn about their neighborhood.

BEEF "gambled" $100 on a school beautification project in an elementary school ravaged by a "renovation" that had left display cases empty and the walls barren. Joseph Pecorino's innovative proposal was for funds to purchase ceramic tiles and grout for making mosaics to beautify the school. About 100 young artists in the third and fourth grades gained experience in using a new art medium in this project. They created the designs and set the tiles and in the process learned the values of cooperative group planning.

Another art project funded by BEEF involved computer graphics. Gloria Rabinowitz at John F. Kennedy High School needed $100 to continue a rental arrangement with a computer leasing agency for an exciting pilot project utilizing *Mind-set*, a high quality computer visual design program. Although the board of education had pledged to finance a permanent computer installation, a cash shortfall prevented it from doing so. Unless Rabinowitz could find $100, two of her classes would be deprived of a powerful teaching tool that she reported was contributing significantly to improving her students' attendance and attitude as well as their thinking and manual skills. Thanks to BEEF, a crisis was averted and a concerned teacher was able to establish the first computer art course in a Bronx high school.

The spectrum of BEEF-funded projects in the humanities promoted what John Ruskin said is the true purpose of art – to enable "head, hand, and heart to go together."

Projects in the Social Sciences

Just as BEEF grants in the humanities have encouraged educators to heed Calvin Coolidge's advice "to dream what they dare to dream," its funded programs in the social sciences have been influenced by Cicero's aphorism that "not to know what happened before one was born is always to be a child." Projects developed by Bronx teachers and funded by BEEF have helped to build their students' pride in their community and its history.

An important component of many of the BEEF projects has been the development of civic spirit. This certainly was the case with Richard Pochter's fourth-grade class. Pochter wanted his students to know about the role the Bronx River played in the early history of this country and about how environmentalists today are trying to save it from pollution and turn it into a recreational resource. Pochter invited speakers from the Bronx River Restoration to talk to his class about the river's past, present restoration efforts, and careers associated with the environmental development of rivers. To build awareness and enthusiasm for the project, the BEEF grant provided the youngsters with funds to design informative posters and to purchase Bronx River Restoration T-shirts. The children, in turn, served as cadres within their neighborhoods, disseminating their newly acquired knowledge to parents and community organizations as well as to other school children in assembly programs.

Pride in one's community and awareness of the historic importance of the Hunts Point neighborhood were the focal concerns of Cheryl Lugo. Her proposal was for intermediate school students to conduct research about the streets and buildings of the neighborhood. This involved interviewing elderly community residents in senior citizen homes and taking photographs of historic neighborhood sites. With her $100 mini-grant this creative teacher was able to purchase film and audio tapes for the interviewing, pay for student transportation to different parts of the community, and even buy a $50 U.S. Savings Bond as a prize for the student that had learned the most about the history of the Hunts Point community.

Where best to develop civic spirit if not in the school itself? Leslie Penzias, coach of the girls' volleyball team at Grace Dodge Vocational High School, was concerned about mounting student truancy, disorderliness, and academic failure. As a coach, she was convinced that involvement in extracurricular activities allows students who have not achieved academically to receive another type of recognition. Her proposal was to provide this type of recognition as a way of improv-

ing morale in her school. With her mini-grant of $100 she was able to purchase film to photograph students who excelled in some extracurricular activity. She and members of her volleyball team mounted the photographs, supplied descriptive captions, and displayed them at selected locations in the building. The pictures voiced a powerful message: Join the winners!

Strengthening student awareness of our pluralistic society was a major aim of Anthony Elia, assistant principal at Walton High School. With video and audio tapes and 35-mm film supplied by a BEEF mini-grant, social studies students became involved in an oral history project in which they learned why the families of classmates from diverse ethnic backgrounds had immigrated to the United States, how well they had adjusted to a new land, and how the principle of cultural diffusion was operating right now in Walton High School.

Helping the borough's youths to become sensitive to others is a thread woven into many of the proposals BEEF has funded. Equally important has been the goal of fostering career awareness. Evelyn Kantor, a guidance counselor at the Bronx High School of Science, sought to enable adolescents to plan realistically for their educational and vocational future. Her BEEF mini-grant allowed her to purchase the software for scoring the Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory, which is administered to ninth-graders to make them more aware of careers that match their personal interests. Indeed, if education is to the soul what sculpture is to a block of marble, clearly this mini-grant, like so many others funded by BEEF, has provided the educators with the means of shaping more purposeful and productive lives for students.

Mini-Grants in Mathematics and Science

There were 11 proposals submitted for mini-grants in mathematics and science for the 1986-87 school year. All were funded. Several of these projects integrated science and mathematics with other parts of the curriculum. Two of them, described in the previous chapter, involving the first high school computer art course in a Bronx high school and the environmental restoration of the Bronx River also included a humanities and social studies component. Another, designed to teach learning disabled students about living things, is discussed in the next chapter.

A student surveyor proposal, submitted by science/computer teacher Richard Bollinger, was designed to improve students' mathematical abilities by relating math to the real world. The major objective of this program was to improve skills in measurement, graphing, computation, and understanding geometric concepts while integrating the computer in the science curriculum. Approximately 100 fifth- and sixth-graders were involved in this highly motivating program. Students measured the heights of many of the taller buildings from ground level. Clinometers were used to measure angles, trundle wheels to measure distance, and a computer program to perform calculations. Students learned to draw measured structures to scale on graph paper. At the culmination of the unit, a "survey journal" was prepared. The trigonometric calculations, beyond the abilities of these students, were not needed because the computer handled them easily. The objectives

of the program were evaluated by appraising students' performances in measurement and computer operation. With the $100 mini-grant from BEEF for purchasing a clinometer, trundle wheel, digital pedometer, tape measure, plastic protractors, graph and computer paper, metal washers, and computer disks, Richard Bollinger's dream became a reality.

Another innovative project involved bilingual students in a partnership between the school and local businesses. Gregorio Velazquez and three students from Evander Childs High School needed funds for a student-training program in computer literacy and word-processing skills. The project included peer tutoring for bilingual students and a business partnership to provide students with on-the-job training through part-time and vacation employment. The teacher trained three advanced bilingual students as peer tutors in such computer literacy skills as keyboarding, handling diskettes, using software, and understanding important safety and security procedures used by all microcomputer laboratories. The BEEF funds were used primarily for training the peer tutors, who, in turn, taught these skills to 12 students per month. The peer tutors and other students were placed in part-time and vacation period jobs through business partnerships.

Lillian Borrero, an elementary school teacher, established a "Science Club" to give students the opportunity to explore geology, physics, and chemistry, which were not adequately covered in the elementary school curriculum. She used her mini-grant to purchase a science investigation series, chemistry set, pollution test kit, poster board, and markers. The science club developed a cadre of interested and gifted science students who could serve as a springboard for science learning in the classrooms. It also developed a manual of experiments and projects for teachers and encouraged students to compete in science fairs. A student booklist also was developed. Twenty-five students in grades three to six experienced a hands-on approach to science.

Marian Baer, a third- and fourth-grade science teacher, believed that city children need to gain knowledge and respect for living things.

With her $100 mini-grant from BEEF, she purchased six butterfly gardens to allow children to witness the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly. This exciting and wondrous event in nature would open up a new world to city children. They watched the different stages of caterpillar growth: shedding skins, changing into chrysalids, and emerging as painted lady butterflies. One butterfly garden was placed in every third and fourth grade, involving 180 children. Instructional activities included studying butterflies, writing letters to order larvae, setting up containers for viewing, reading instructions, scheduling feeding, writing observations in a log, and drawing. The exciting culminaton of the project was the release of the butterflies.

Another project integrated science with a language immersion program for non-English-speaking students. Olga Naccarella's proposal was an elementary science program for E.S.L. students that integrated learning about scientific processes and other science skills with learning English vocabulary. Her mini-grant was used to purchase science kits for weather, electricity, and magnets. The major objective of the program was to improve and facilitate the non-English-speaking and limited-English-speaking children's overall understanding of the English language by having them do hands-on experiments. At the same time the children were having fun learning science, they were experiencing success in mastering the language, leading to an improved self-image. The success of the program, measured by pre- and post-tests, was evident in the children's improvement in following directions, sequencing, attention to detail, math research skills, communication skills, writing skills, language skills, and science knowledge.

Mini-Grants in Special Education

Start talking special education and educators start calling for more specialized staff, larger budgets, smaller class sizes, and elaborate equipment and facilities. Special education has become synonymous with expensive education, but Bronx educators have shown that much can be accomplished through teacher ingenuity and a modest $100 mini-grant. It's amazing to see what can be done with a hundred dollars. The BEEF projects described here involved more than 200 pupils at all grade levels in a variety of special education settings, ranging from emotionally handicapped to learning disabled and trainable mentally retarded to the orthopedically handicapped. An analysis of these proposals reveals five common ingredients for improving the quality of special education programs.

1. All the projects emphasized a hands-on approach to learning. When trainable mentally retarded youngsters were learning practical life skills or hyperactive children were learning how to sculpt, they were involved in active, tactile learning. For example, in the trainable mentally retarded classes taught by Irene Fried, Ellen Leonforte, and Joe Kuperblum, the pupils were engaged in mastering survival skills. They learned how to wash and dry dishes, cook and serve food, set a table, and clean up. And they came to appreciate the senses of taste and smell. It is difficult to describe the joy of these special children as they mastered everyday activities that we take for granted. And what was the cost of this project? Two consecutive $100 grants

Special education students learn to cook and serve hamburgers in a project designed to teach them life skills.

in 1985 and 1986 purchased an assortment of such small appliances as a can opener and electric mixer as well as place settings and utensils for 16 settings.

2. Projects emphasized an investigative approach to learning. For example, learning disabled children at an elementary school planned, directed, and edited a documentary film about their school. At an intermediate school, special education youngsters observed and recorded growth and development of classroom animal pets.

Mina Josef transformed her classroom for sixth- and seventh-grade pupils who are orthopedically handicapped, learning disabled, or emotionally handicapped into "Our Living World." Her students had hands-on experience with living things. They bred hamsters, fish, and other animals and were involved in the cleaning, feeding, and caring for all the animals in this classroom Noah's Ark. They also learned how to repair aquariums, clean tanks, and set up grow lights for plants.

Her mini-grant stressed problem solving and student research. The students collected data over several weeks and learned how to draw logical conclusions from data collected. As children tracked the progress of the animals, they were able to determine those needs that are common to all species and those needs peculiar to certain animals.

3. Proposals were designed to meet specific needs of students. Bilingual special education youngsters involved in planning and implementing a hobby project were encouraged to socialize to improve their oral communication skills. High school special education students were prepared for the world of work by providing them with pre-employment positions.

One such effort for improving the employment prospects of special education students is the "Morris High School Work Study Program." This program was written by Virginia Velez, a special education student herself. Virginia realized that her classmates needed to become more independent in the tasks of daily living in order to know their capabilities for successfully holding a job. This work study program involved 24 special education students in grades 11 and 12 performing tasks in a carefully structured and supervised setting that paid employees would normally perform. The BEEF mini-grant was used to pay stipends to students who performed these tasks. A site supervisor evaluated the students on a weekly basis, monitoring individual performance, attitude, attendance, punctuality, and judgment. Virginia, the creator and participant in this program, was singled out for a BEEF Medal of Excellence. Many of Virginia's friends congratulated her at the awards ceremony.

4. Projects involved many students in the development and implementation of the learning activity. In one elementary school, 50 pupils interviewed neighborhood workers in their community. In another elementary school, 24 bilingual special education pupils participated in planning and implementing a hobby projects hour.

Gwendolyn Alvarado's "Hobby Hours for Bilingual Special Education Children" involved students from pre-kindergarten to third

Virginia Velez (second from right), a student at Morris High School, receives BEEF's Medal of Excellence from school board member Stephen Franse (center).

grade. Group activities led by volunteer teachers and parents stimulated socialization among these bilingual children, who otherwise would not have many opportunities to converse. Through participation in individual and group hobby projects, these children were motivated to socialize and at the same time were learning curriculum-related content. The mini-grant funded such inexpensive items as arts and crafts materials, cooking supplies, educational games, and scouting materials.

5. Proposals had visible culminating activities. Among the most notable examples were the trainable mentally retarded youngsters who prepared a class brunch, the elementary school students who produced a documentary film about school life, and Gayle Smith's "Sculpture Art" project described earlier in which her hyperactive students had their sculptures on display at the school art fair.

Other projects involving special education students gave them an awareness of the contributions of different people to the community.

In Evelyn Jackson's special education class, guest speakers such as a police officer, garbage collector, karate teacher, pet store owner, firefighter, and museum director told the children about their work and how it contributed to the community. The children prepared for their guest speakers by reading materials and viewing audiovisuals purchased with BEEF funds and then drafting questions to ask their guests. The children recorded their guests' answers on cassettes and followed up by writing their impressions of the various occupations represented by their guest speakers. By reaching beyond the classroom, Jackson made it possible for her special education students to develop their reading, writing, and listening skills and at the same time fostered their appreciation of people who were making important contributions to their community.

In every instance the BEEF mini-grants helped to enhance the self-image of special education students. Many of the projects provided students opportunities to practice reading, writing, and other language arts skills at a level suited to their individual needs. Other mini-grants involved projects that treated special education students as valued persons who can participate in many kinds of activities suited to their own needs.

Instead of waiting for grandiose solutions for problems affecting our inner-city schools, we need to support grassroots initiatives that allow both teachers and students to implement their creative ideas. BEEF's mini-grant program has fostered the twin ideals of equity and excellence. The funded programs benefited all students; no one was ever excluded for any reason. And the ideas borne from individual teachers' creative proposals released a chain reaction, spreading educational excellence more effectively and efficiently than could any systemwide initiative.

Promoting Educational Excellence

An atmosphere of despair pervades many inner-city schools. Antiquated physical plants smeared with graffiti, teachers burning out, and students victimized by slum conditions are common in urban areas. The ravages of poverty, prejudice, and broken homes endured by our children will not disappear by any sleight of hand. Nevertheless, significant strides have been made to rescue children in the Bronx. The BEEF mini-grants have produced dramatic results by supporting the imagination and ingenuity of dedicated educators. Bronx educators and students are using the BEEF mini-grants to reach out beyond the classroom to support their creative educational endeavors. Indeed, the efforts of BEEF have shown that people have not given up and are succeeding in turning education into success stories.

BEEF is succeeding because it has recognized and responded to problems endemic to urban school systems. It is succeeding because it recognizes that education takes place at the grassroots level, between teachers and students, who are engaged not in defining problems but in finding ways to understand and solve them.

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